

THE P-TECH PROGRAMME



Innovative Access to Third-Level Education

One of Ireland's most innovative third-level institutions, National College of Ireland's mission is to change lives through education. With 6,500 students across its key areas of human relations, business, computing, education and psychology, NCI delivers access to lifelong learning through RPEL (recognition of prior experiential learning), UDL (universal design for learning), and flexible delivery mechanisms including apprenticeships, online and blended learning, and classes delivered in the evening and/or at the weekend. A warmly supportive HEI, NCI is located at the crossroads of the IFSC and Silicon Docklands and has strong relationships with industry, valuing entrepreneurship and employability.

1. Initiative overview

Programme overview

P-TECH (Pathways in Technology) is an innovative education–industry partnership programme supported and delivered through the **P-TECH Ireland Project Office** at **National College of Ireland (NCI)**. The programme brings together DEIS post-primary schools in Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC), further and higher education providers, and a growing network of committed industry partners to widen access to education and employment pathways for young people.

Initiated by IBM in the USA in 2011 and established in Ireland in 2018 with Government support, and NCI as the nominated higher education partner, P-TECH was introduced as a pilot to address educational disadvantage and underrepresentation at third level. The Irish model has been carefully **reimagined to align with the national education system** and is underpinned by QQI-validated curricula for both students and teachers.
Current school partners include:

Current school partners include:

- Larkin Community College
- Marino College
- O'Connell's Secondary School
- Rosmini Community School
- St Joseph's CBS, Fairview

Current industry partners:

- A&L Goodbody
- Cisco
- IBM Ireland
- Irish Life
- Irish Rail
- SISK
- Uisce Éireann

Work placement supporters:

- Accenture
- ServiceNow
- Yahoo



As part of the P-TECH programme, students in their Senior Cycle (4th–6th Year) have the opportunity to complete a **QQI Level 6 Certificate in P-TECH**, building academic, digital and professional capabilities alongside their regular school syllabus. P-TECH graduates then have the option to progress into the **Degree in Digital and Business Skills (DABS)**, a tertiary degree jointly delivered by **City of Dublin ETB (Years 1–2) and National College of Ireland (Years 3–4)**, creating a clear, supported pathway from school to further and higher education and onwards to employment. DABS is also open to direct application via the National Tertiary Office.

The **P-TECH Ireland Project Office** works closely with schools and industry partners to coordinate work placements, mentoring, employer engagement, events and learner supports, ensuring that education pathways remain aligned with the evolving needs of industry.

Key objective

To widen participation in further and higher education by creating an inclusive, credit-bearing pathway that integrates secondary and higher education with real-world workplace learning.



Why P-TECH is distinctly innovative

P-TECH's unique value lies in its ability to:

- Embed QQI-validated qualifications within secondary education
- Provide a non-CAO progression route to a Level 8 degree
- Support both students and teachers through bespoke curriculum development
- Deliver structured, mentored workplace learning in partnership with industry
- Operate as a long-term, collaborative model rather than a short-term access intervention.

2. Programme development & implementation

Development journey

P-TECH in Ireland was introduced as a pilot in response to persistent educational disadvantage in the NEIC and the growing disconnect between education pathways and industry needs. From the outset, the programme required the **design and validation of entirely new curricula**, tailored to the Irish education system and aligned with QQI standards.

Key development milestones include:

- **2018–2020:** Co-design and QQI validation of the **Level 6 Certificate in P-TECH** for students, and a **Level 9 Certificate in Educational Practice for P-TECH** for teachers.
- **2020–2021:** Rapid pivot in delivery model due to COVID-19, including virtual industry engagement and adapted workplace learning.
- **2024:** Launch of the **BA (Hons) Degree in Digital and Business Skills (DABS)** as a formal progression pathway.
- **2025:** Governance review, revalidation of the curriculum, transition to Phase 2 of the pilot, and establishment of the P-TECH Project Office.

Implementation over the past 12 months

The past year has been a pivotal period for P-TECH, characterised by reflection, redesign and consolidation:

- Completion of a **comprehensive governance review** (January 2025).
- Establishment of a **dedicated P-TECH Project Office** at NCI, funded by the Department of Education and Youth, in response to this review.
- Appointment of a Project Office Director, School Learning & Support Manager, and Employer Engagement Manager, to work in tandem with the NCI P-TECH academic team.
- **Revalidation and updating of the curriculum** to address challenges identified by students, teachers and industry partners – particularly around Transition Year work placements, with hybrid working patterns now the norm.
- Strengthened employer onboarding, clearer placement structures, and improved learner supports.

P-TECH Project Office team

- Cyrilla Costello, Employer Engagement Manager
- Carrie Archer, Programme Director and Assistant Professor at NCI
- Deirdre Kennedy, Project Office Director
- Evanna Keaveny, School Learning & Support Manager



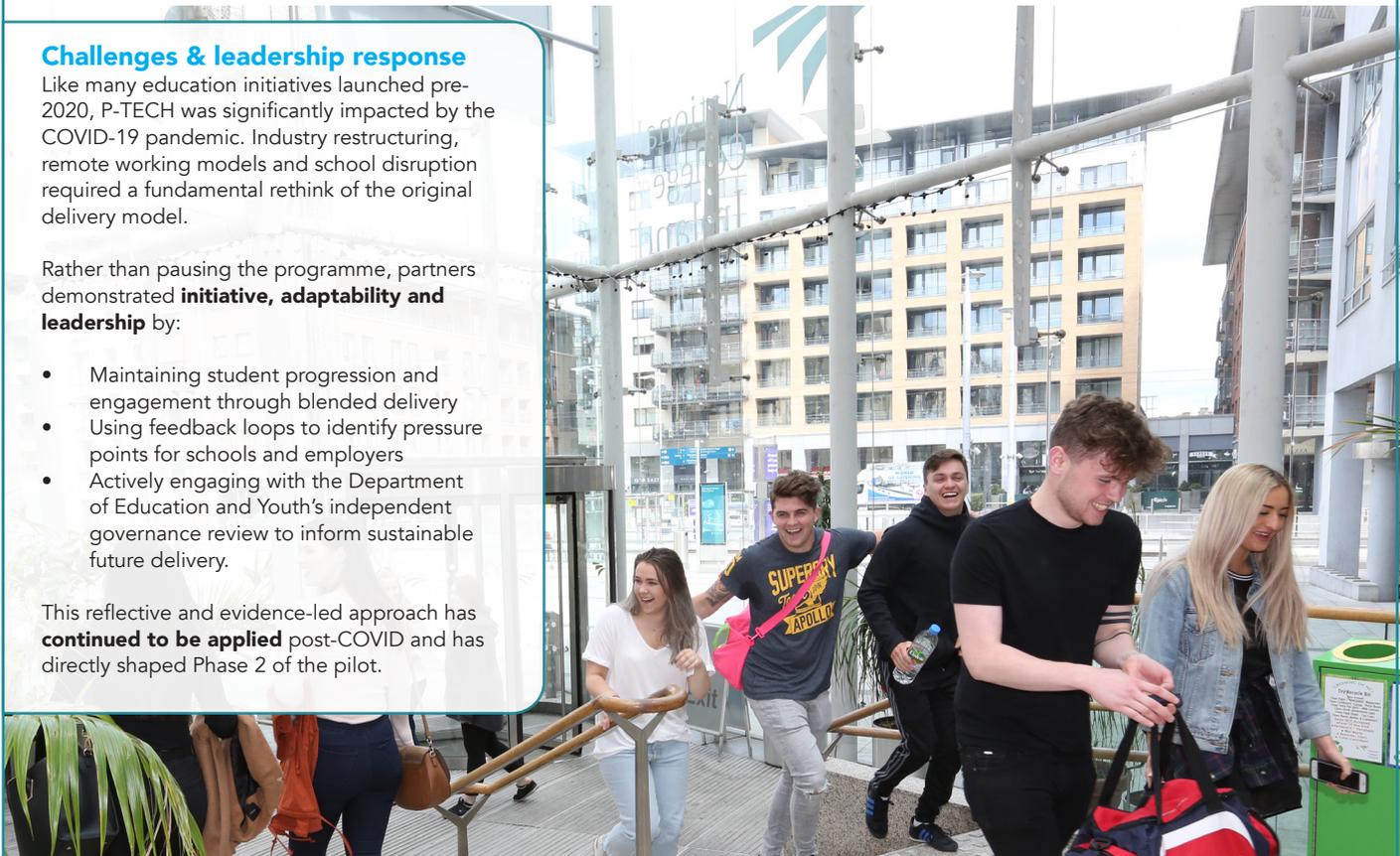
Challenges & leadership response

Like many education initiatives launched pre-2020, P-TECH was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Industry restructuring, remote working models and school disruption required a fundamental rethink of the original delivery model.

Rather than pausing the programme, partners demonstrated **initiative, adaptability and leadership** by:

- Maintaining student progression and engagement through blended delivery
- Using feedback loops to identify pressure points for schools and employers
- Actively engaging with the Department of Education and Youth's independent governance review to inform sustainable future delivery.

This reflective and evidence-led approach has **continued to be applied** post-COVID and has directly shaped Phase 2 of the pilot.



3. Institutional & community benefits Benefits to the education ecosystem

P-TECH has strengthened collaboration across the tertiary education landscape by:

- Creating a **formal bridge between further and higher education**, with City of Dublin ETB delivering Years 1 & 2 of the DABS programme and NCI delivering Years 3 & 4
- Supporting **teacher upskilling and professional practice** through a dedicated Level 9 qualification
- Embedding **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles across curriculum, assessment and learner supports.

Community impact

Operating within the NEIC, P-TECH contributes to:

- Increased awareness of higher education pathways among students and families
- Earlier engagement with role models and career possibilities

Industry feedback

"As a new industry partner, what strongly resonates with SISK about the P-TECH programme is its innovative, long-term approach to developing future talent through meaningful collaboration between education and industry... P-TECH creates a practical pathway that bridges the gap between learning and employment, while also encouraging creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability."

- SISK, Industry Partner

"P-TECH volunteering is a testament to our employees' dedication to education and community. Their engagement is a beacon of inspiration for students and a catalyst for positive change."

- Irish Life, Industry Partner

Feedback from schools

"P-TECH has enabled our students to develop their own sense of responsibility and to become more self-aware, self-believing, and independent individuals."

- Larkin Community School, School Partner

"The emphasis on teaching pupils digital skills has made it possible to suit each student's unique learning needs and abilities in the classroom. Students' confidence and ability to learn independently has grown... which has also helped them develop greater confidence in themselves. As teachers, we recognise that this is equally as important as the content of the curriculum."

- St Joseph's CBS, School Partner

Feedback from stakeholders has been actively used to:

- Redesign work placement structures
- Clarify partner roles and expectations
- Strengthen learner preparation and support mechanisms.

4. Learner benefits & inclusion

P-TECH primarily serves learners from **DEIS school communities**, many of whom are underrepresented in higher education.

Key learner benefits

- Access to **credit-bearing qualifications** while still in school.
- Increased confidence, self-belief and career clarity.
- Exposure to real workplace environments and professional expectations.
- Clear, supported progression routes into further or higher education.

Progression & current participation

- **394 Certificate in P-TECH students** currently enrolled (2025/26)
- **19 first-year DABS students**
- **14 second-year DABS students** education.

The DABS programme is deliberately designed as a **lead-on pathway**, not a stand-alone outcome, reinforcing P-TECH's role as a foundation for:

- 394 Certificate in P-TECH students currently enrolled (2025/26)
- 19 first-year DABS students
- 14 second-year DABS students education.

Student voice

"I learned how to examine my own actions and recognise what I could improve, especially after receiving feedback from teachers and teammates. This made me more open to constructive criticism and helped me grow more confident in my ability to learn independently."

- P-TECH Student, 2025 reflection

"For me personally, P-TECH demonstrates how partnerships can reduce inequality by giving students access to mentors, networks, and experiences they might not otherwise have."

- P-TECH Student, 2025 reflection

5. Evidence, monitoring & impact

P-TECH measures success across participation, progression and engagement indicators, including:

- Student participation and retention rates
- Completion of the Certificate in P-TECH
- Progression into DABS, other further education, or employment
- Employer participation and volunteer engagement hours
- Qualitative feedback from students, teachers and industry partners.



Since 2019:

- **1,398 students impacted**
- **16,500+ industry volunteer hours contributed**
- **10+ active industry partners, with new partners joining Phase 2**

The 2025 governance review highlighted the need for more structured impact tracking, which is now being addressed through:

- Centralised data oversight within the P-TECH Project Office
- Clearer KPIs linked to learner progression and partner engagement.

6. Excellence in inclusion & partnership

P-TECH exemplifies excellence in partnership by:

- Going beyond access outreach to create **formal, credit-bearing progression pathways**
- Supporting both **students and teachers** through tailored qualifications
- Enabling collaboration across **secondary, further education and higher education** sectors
- Building long-term, values-led relationships with industry partners.

The programme's inclusion focus is reinforced through:

- Early and sustained engagement with learners
- Scaffolded workplace learning experiences
- Removal of traditional progression barriers (i.e. CAO points).

7. Replicability & future scalability

While P-TECH remains in pilot phase, its success has led to:

- Renewed funding from the Department of Education and Youth, including commitment to a Project Office for a 5-year term
- Explicit recognition by the DEY of the programme's **replicability and scalability potential**.

The focus of the past 12 months has been on building the **governance, infrastructure and quality assurance** required for sustainable growth. With these foundations now in place, P-TECH is well-positioned for expansion to additional schools, regions and industry sectors.

